



# **Decision Memo**

## **Umatilla Electric Cooperative Underground Powerline Project**

**USDA Forest Service  
Umatilla National Forest  
Walla Walla Ranger District**

**Umatilla and Union Counties, Oregon**

### **Background**

Umatilla Electric Cooperative operates the single phase and 3-phase power distribution network in the Tollgate, Oregon area. Their power lines provide electrical power to the Tollgate Work Center, the Spout Springs Recreation Residences, the Spout Springs Ski Area, and the Spout Springs Communications Site. Umatilla Electric Cooperative has experienced problems during the winter months from damage to their distribution lines from snow, ice, wind, falling branches and falling trees. This damage can result in power outages that can last from several hours to days. These power outages can cause significant inconveniences to their customers in and around the Tollgate/Spout Springs area.

### **Decision**

I have decided to amend the Umatilla Electric Cooperative's special use permit to show the conversion from overhead to underground power lines and to authorize Umatilla Electric Cooperative to convert their overhead power distribution lines to buried lines as requested by the company.

The buried powerlines would be placed in conduit which is laid in a trench that has been dug by an excavator, or where a directional boring machine has been used to bore under existing roads or other sensitive areas. In areas designated for boring where the boring machine is unable to penetrate the substrate, a short stretch of overhead powerline will be used to span that location.

All roads and travel ways included in this project will follow Umatilla National Forest specifications for surfacing materials and drainage controls such as water bars and/or rolling drain dips.

All disturbed locations that are not existing roads will be seeded with a prescribed seed mix applied at a rate of 20 lbs. per acre. The seed will be either lightly raked in or mixed with the soil using a harrow chain. All seeded areas will be mulched with a certified weed free straw.

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or an environmental assessment (EA). The applicable category of actions is identified in agency procedures as *Construction or reconstruction of existing telephone or utility lines in a designated corridor* 36 CFR 220.6(e)(2). This category of action(s) is applicable because the existing overhead powerlines are all in established corridors.



I find that there are no extraordinary circumstances that would warrant further analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS. I took into account resource conditions identified in agency procedures that should be considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstances might exist:

- Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species – There are no federally listed TES species within the project area.

A no effect determination has been given to the federally listed plant *Silene spaldingii* because it does not occur and there is no habitat for it within the project area. A no impact determination has been given for all sensitive plant species listed on the Regional Forester's Sensitive Species List (RFSSL) because none of these species are known to occur within the proposed project area (Botany Report, located in project record).

The project would have no effect on any ESA fish species and no impact on USFS Region 6 sensitive fish species because no project activities would occur near any streams containing listed fish species (Fisheries Report, located in project record).

The project would have no effect on any ESA listed terrestrial wildlife species and/or their habitat. A not impact determination has been given to all sensitive species with the project area (Wildlife Report, located in project record).

- Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds – The project will not have any effect on any floodplain, wetland, or municipal watershed (Hydrology Report, located in project record).
- Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas – The project area does not contain any congressionally designated wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas (Final EIS, Umatilla National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, Appendix C).
- Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas – No activities occur within the boundaries of Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) or Potential Wilderness and thus there is no effect on either from this action.
- Research natural areas – The project does not occur in a research natural area (Final EIS, Umatilla National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, p. 4-31).
- American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites – No information on locations or concerns of religious sites has been made at this time. Consultations with local Tribes is ongoing.
- Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas – An appropriate inventory has been conducted for this project. All known sites will be avoided. Should any additional sites be identified during ground disturbing activities, forest archaeology staff would immediately be notified.

## Public Involvement

This action was originally listed as a proposal on the Umatilla National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions and updated periodically during the analysis. Additionally, project scoping and 30-day





comment periods were conducted and were initiated by letter requesting public input dated March 31, 2016. No public input was received regarding this project during the 30-day comment period.

## Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

This decision is consistent with the *Umatilla National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan)*, Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), and Record of Decision (ROD) dated June 11, 1990 and all subsequent NEPA analysis for Forest Plan amendments. The project was designed in conformance with the Umatilla National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan.

The project is in compliance with the Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, Safe Drinking Water Act, Executive Order 11988, Executive Order 11990, and other applicable laws (See Project Record). There is no prime farmland, rangeland or forestland within the project area.

The project is consistent with the *Managing Competing and Unwanted Vegetation FEIS*, its *Mediated Agreement and 1988 Record of Decision*, and the *Pacific Northwest Region FEIS for the Invasive Plant Program and 2005 Record of Decision*.

The project incorporates by reference the *Umatilla National Forest Invasive Plant FEIS and its Record of Decision (2010)*. The Invasive Plant FEIS documents the effects of various means of invasive plant treatment. These treatments include chemical, mechanical, and manual methods. The document set forth a list of known invasive plant sites that are in need of treatment and also created a system, known as Early Detection Rapid Response (EDRR), whereby newly discovered sites may be added to the list of treatable sites after being reviewed using an established matrix. Any rapid response to invasive plant spread identified during the implementation of this project will utilize the EDRR process and the associated analysis and methodology that support it found within the Invasive Plant FEIS.

## Administrative Review (Appeal) Opportunities

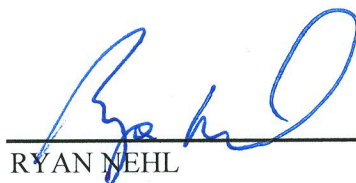
In accordance with regulations found at 36 CFR 215.12 (e)(1), this decision is not subject to administrative appeal.

## Implementation Date

Project implementation can begin immediately.

## Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Jeff Bloom, Project Leader, or Deanna Engelmann, Acting District Environmental Coordinator, at the Walla Walla Ranger District, 1415 W. Rose St., Walla Walla, WA 99362 or call 509-522-6290 for further information concerning this project.



RYAN NEHL

Acting Forest Supervisor

7-18-16

Date



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